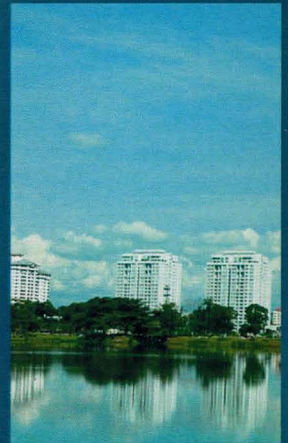
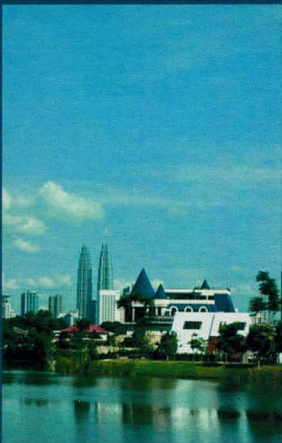


Visioning Malaysian Landscape



**Mazlina Mansor
Ismawi Hj. Zen
Jamilah Othman
Nor Zalina Harun**



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INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA

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SPECULATIVE EXPLORATION ON PLANTS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON PLACE NAMES OF TRADITIONAL MALAY SETTLEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

The life of a Malay is very much intertwined with nature. The paper explores the relationship between him and the place he lives on, specifically how plants that are important to him are being immortalized in the names of the place he lives in. The normal process seems to be that a place is named after a major river on whose bank the place is located. The river in turn seems to derive its name from on the plants found on its banks. Investigations showed that the tradition of place name is actually pervasive throughout the Peninsula Malaysia and Sarawak.

Keywords: river, village, history

INTRODUCTION

Perak is a Malay name for a precious metal i.e. silver. The state of Perak got its name from the metal. So we were told. Others said that Perak derived its name from the famous Malay warrior and statesman of Melaka called Tun Perak. For some time now the writer has been intrigued by this name because it seems to be a deviation from the norm of Malay name-giving tradition or Malay place name. It is almost unheard of in the Malay tradition to name any place after the content of its land, precious it might be. The only one that could be recalled to mind is the reference to the Malay Peninsula as “Permata Nilam” in a famous song whose lyric was used by Ibu Zain to re-spark the spirit of unity and patriotism that seemed to be on the wane due to the split within the ranks when Dato’ Onn Jaafar left UMNO¹ to form the multi-racial Partai Negara amongst the fighters for independence viz. Bahtera Merdeka². Permata Nilam refers to a precious stone which is dark red in colour. Perhaps it was to remind the patriots about the value of the land where the blood that accompanied their coming to this earth was washed to unite with the soil.³ At the most the reference was just a poetic sobriquet. One would understand the reason for the choice of the nickname other than the fact that it

¹ United Malay National Organization (UMNO) was the political party that united almost all Malay political groupings and fought a successful struggle for the independence of the Malay States from the British.

² Literally translated as ‘Independent Galleon’

³ As in many native and aboriginal cultures, the Malays have very blurred idea of political boundaries, rather a region or quarter of the earth that they identify as their birthplace, so their world; the Malay World. The Malays do not have the concept of ‘Fatherland’ as in the German tradition or the ‘Motherland’ as in the Indian tradition, but true to a warrior tradition they have a concept of ‘Tanah Tumpah Darah’, lit. ‘Land Where the Blood Washed’ with ‘the Blood’ here referring to the blood that accompanies their birth which get washed into the land, symbolizing their eternal relationship and unity with the land; protecting the land from intrusion is protecting their honour.